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Kidnappers: Americans leave Beirut

United Press International

BEIRUT — An Islamic terror movement has offered to release five kidnapped U.S. citizens if the estimated 200 Americans still living in Lebanon leave the country at once.

The offer was made Friday by a telephone caller claiming to represent the Islamic Jihad (Holy War), the terror group suspected of carrying out bombings that killed 258 Americans in Beirut in 1983.

In Washington, a State Department spokesman said the offer would not force Americans to leave Lebanon.

"All Americans should leave Lebanon," the caller told Western reporters. "We shall release all five we are holding without any conditions if our demand is heeded."

The five Americans being held by the guerrillas are the Rev. Martin Lawrence Jenco, a 50-year-old Roman Catholic priest abducted Tuesday; the Rev. Benjamin E. Wier, 60, a Presbyterian minister abducted in May; William Buckley, 56, a U.S. Embassy political officer abducted in March; Jeremy Levin, 52, the Beirut bureau chief of Cable News Network, abducted in March, and Peter Kilburn, 60, a librarian at the American University of Beirut, apparently abducted Nov. 31.

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The anonymous telephone caller said Jenco, the director of Catholic Relief Services in Lebanon, was in good health despite a heart ailment.

"We allowed a cardiologist to examine him on Wednesday and he is in good shape," the caller said.

Jenco, a native of Chicago, was the eighth American kidnapped in the last 10 months and the fifth still missing.

Lebanese authorities have estimated that there are about 200 Americans still living in Lebanon, 50 of them in West Beirut.

"The United States is not going to be forced out of Lebanon," State Department spokesman Alan Romberg said in Washington Friday, noting that forcing Americans to leave the Middle East nation has been the continuing goal of the Islamic Jihad.

The offer to release the five kidnapped Americans came as the Rev. Jesse Jackson said in Chicago Friday he would travel to Lebanon to make a "moral appeal" for Jenco's release.